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SUBJECT: THAILAND'S TOP IPR COP TRANSFERRED

REF: BANGKOK 419

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Thailand's lead police commander for IPR enforcement has been eased out of his position as part of a larger police shakeup. Rights holders had given General Visut high marks for reinvigorating police action against IPR violators, with high-profile raids on manufacturers and distributors of pirated product. However, his penchant for publicity earned him enmity from others. His replacement is well-considered within the police force, but a general unknown in the IP community. It remains to be seen whether he will place the same level of priority on IPR enforcement as had General Visut. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Effective May 1, Police General Visut Vanichbut, Commander of the Economic & Technological Crime Suppression Division (ECOTEC) and the lead police official on IPR enforcement in Thailand, was transferred to the Children, Juvenile and Women's Division. General Visut's transfer was widely expected after his close ally National Police Chief Seripisut Temiyavej, who had strong links to the previous coup government, was himself pushed out in March by a newly elected administration. Visut remains on the job as Acting Commander of ECOTEC until a royal endorsement of the police transfer list is signed.

¶3. (SBU) Since assuming his post in February 2007, General Visut had been held in high regard by IP rights holders in Thailand. Soon after the USTR announcement that Thailand would be elevated to the Special 301 Priority Watch List (PWL) for its continuing pervasive piracy problems, Visut declared he had taken it upon himself to remove Thailand from PWL. He personally led a series of high-profile raids on pirated optical disc manufacturers resulting in large-scale seizures. Rights holders praised his enthusiasm for IPR enforcement and his willingness to conduct ex officio actions, undertaking raids without waiting for requests from rights holders. Others, however, noted that although Visut appeared to be not personally corrupt, he demanded compensation for his forces' efforts from rights holders. The practice was not uncommon in the past, but was brought to new levels by Visut. His showboating style and credit-grabbing earned him enmity from other RTG officials.

¶4. (SBU) A not unwelcome casualty of Police Chief Seripisut's dismissal was the transfer of General Apichart Chuaeates, commander of the Metropolitan Police Bureau's Division 6 and another close ally of Seripisut. Apichart's division had jurisdiction over areas with the highest concentration of wholesale and retail piracy sales in Bangkok, and rights holders had earlier protested Apichart's unwillingness to undertake effective enforcement against IPR violators who in some cases operated just down the street from the district's main police station (see reftel).

¶5. (SBU) Visut's replacement will be General Kovit Wongrungroj, who will transfer over from the Railway Police Bureau after the police transfer list is endorsed by the palace. Kovit is considered an able commander but is not widely known in the IPR community, and it remains to be seen if he will tackle Thailand's piracy problems with the same vigor. Police officials say that General Visut had taken a

particular interest in enforcing IPR laws, but at the expense of enforcing tax and finance laws which also fall within ECOTEC's responsibility. In the interim between Visut's transfer and the new commander taking up post, rights holders say obtaining police manpower for IP raids has been extraordinarily difficult. The Motion Picture Association's local representative told Econoff that raids on retail outlets of pirated product are off 80 percent since the transfer was announced.

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